United Nations A/60/PV.51

General Assembly

Sixtieth session

Official Records

51st plenary meeting
Monday, 14 November 2005, 10 a.m.
New York

President: Mr. Eliasson ..... (Sweden)

The meeting was called to order at 10.15 a.m.

Agenda item 73

Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/223 and Corr.1)

Draft resolutions (A/60/L.18 and A/60/L.20)

(a) Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations

Reports of the Secretary-General (A/60/86, A/60/87, A/60/89, A/60/227, A/60/302 and A/60/432)

(c) Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequence of the Chernobyl disaster

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/443)

Draft resolution (A/60/L.19)

(d) Assistance to the Palestinian people

Report of the Secretary-General (A/60/90)

The President: It is a special honour for me to open today's plenary debate on the issue of strengthening the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. Fourteen years ago, I was personally involved in the negotiations on and adoption of resolution 46/182, which created the main framework and several other main features of the United Nations coordination of international humanitarian assistance, so it is a very special experience to revert to these issues here in the Assembly today.

During the past year, the world has witnessed natural disasters of unprecedented scope and magnitude, from the devastating Indian Ocean tsunami in late December 2004 to the disastrous earthquake that struck South Asia in early October. As of today, as we know, the death toll in Pakistan is still rising, and thousands and thousands of people are in danger of freezing to death as winter sets in. A particularly intense and destructive hurricane season has left many thousands homeless as countries in the Caribbean as well as Central and North America continue to grapple with the effects of severe flooding and mudslides that those storms left behind.

Elsewhere, conflict-based man-made emergencies continue with varying intensity. Formerly warring parties in southern Sudan have signed a peace accord and entered a period of reconciliation. However, the

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conflict in the Darfur region of the Sudan has resulted in a severe humanitarian crisis. Food insecurity, fuelled by a lethal combination of conflict and drought, continues to affect close to 35 million people in sub-Saharan Africa, underlining the need for innovative and creative approaches to better predict and respond to acute malnutrition while tackling the underlying causes of hunger and poverty.

The complexity of today's crises and the growing magnitude of disasters require that humanitarian assistance remain one of the highest priorities of the work of the United Nations. The 2005 world summit offered us an opportunity to reflect on the current humanitarian system and to engage in serious, system-wide reforms. The events of the past year testify to the fact that reforms related to coordination and coherence are not only timely but urgent and, indeed, critical.

Specifically, the summit outcome document (*resolution 60/1*) reaffirms the importance of the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. It further reinforces the need for safe and unhindered access by humanitarian actors to populations in need. It calls upon us to strengthen the capacity to prepare for and respond to disasters and to improve the use of emergency standby capacities under United Nations auspices for rapid response to humanitarian emergencies. Finally, it calls for better predictability of humanitarian funding, notably by improving the current Central Emergency Revolving Fund.

For more than a decade, the Fund has played an important role in providing United Nations agencies with readily available resources to allow them to respond quickly to humanitarian emergencies. However, owing to its limited size and revolving nature, the Fund has faced difficulties in fulfilling its aim of ensuring the provision of adequate resources for use in the initial phase of emergencies. The proposed improved Central Emergency Revolving Fund, which will include a grant element, aims to promote early response in sudden-onset crises as well as to strengthen the core elements of humanitarian response in underfunded crises.

Today's debate is based on several reports from the Secretary-General, including one on sub-item (c), concerning the Chernobyl disaster (*A/60/443*). As next year will mark the twentieth anniversary of that disaster, we are reminded that both national and international efforts are still required to study, mitigate and minimize its long-term consequences.

There is also a report of the Secretary-General on sub-item (d), on assistance to the Palestinian people (*A/60/90*). Humanitarian assistance from the United Nations remains an urgent necessity for the Palestinian people.

Three draft resolutions have been submitted for action today: the first on the South Asian earthquake disaster (*A/60/L.18*), the second on the Chernobyl disaster (*A/60/L.19*) and the third on the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster (*A/60/L.20*).

I look forward to constructive, creative and compassionate deliberations during today's debate. Behind the issues under discussion today are hundreds of thousands of human beings in grave need and, in far too many cases, in mortal danger. Our solidarity with them must be unwavering.

I call now on the representative of Pakistan to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.18.

Mr. Akram (Pakistan): In recent months, the world has seen a succession of devastating natural disasters, the frequency and intensity of which are unprecedented in living memory. The last 12 months have been particularly devastating in terms of the human and material loss caused by scores of such disasters. The report of the Secretary-General on the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations (*A/60/87*) states that, in 2004 alone there were 360 disasters affecting more than 145 million persons and causing more than $103 billion in material damage.

The massive earthquake that took place off the coast of Sumatra in December 2004 and the resulting tsunami brought untold misery to more than 12 nations and killed more than 240,000 people. The hurricanes that struck the Caribbean in the fall of 2004 and that revisited in 2005 in the form of Hurricanes Katrina and Wilma were the strongest in a decade. Despite credible early warnings, a swarm of desert locusts attacked more than 10 countries in West and North Africa, destroying millions of hectares of crops. The spectre of avian flu threatens parts of Asia and Europe and the disease could become a global pandemic.

Five weeks ago, an earthquake registering 7.6 on the Richter scale hit South Asia, causing colossal loss of life and material damage, especially in the North-

West Frontier province of Pakistan, in Jammu and Kashmir, in India and in Afghanistan. It was the worst-ever disaster in the region's history. In Pakistan and Azad Kashmir, 73,000 people died, and more than 74,000 were injured. Millions have been displaced and or are shelterless, even as the cruel Himalayan winter descends over the region. The Secretary-General has described the response to the South Asian earthquake as the most challenging relief operation ever faced by the United Nations.

On 7 November, the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, said that the response to the earthquake represented a test like no other for a Member State and the international community. He observed that over the previous 10 days, extraordinary progress had been made faced with extraordinary challenges. He also paid tribute to Pakistan, its Government, its military and its people. He further noted that the assistance efforts were still not reaching all those below the snow line and that an estimated 200,000 people remained above the snow line. Meanwhile, the World Meteorological Organization had warned that the winter might be unusually harsh.

The United Nations has identified a number of immediate priorities to meet that disaster, including the provision of helicopters, heating, winterized tents, assistance for surgery, vaccinations, mobile health-care teams, blankets, generators, water and sanitation, tarpaulins, stoves and trauma recovery.

On behalf of the Government and the people of Pakistan, I wish to thank the international community for its support and solidarity with Pakistan at this tragic time. I express my profound appreciation to the peoples and the Governments of all Member States represented here, all United Nations agencies, relevant international organizations, civil society and the hundreds of non-governmental organizations for their tremendous outpouring of sympathy and support.

We also wish to thank Secretary-General Kofi Annan for his personal engagement in launching in Geneva the United Nations South Asia earthquake 2005 flash appeal for $550 million and welcome his forthcoming visit to Pakistan for the international donors conference to be held in Islamabad on 19 November 2005.

We would like to commend the excellent role played by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, Mr. Jan Egeland, and his entire team in the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, as well as the admirable contributions of other United Nations entities and national, regional and international organizations for their prompt and active engagement in the field of relief and rescue operations, which have saved hundreds of thousands of precious lives.

In addressing the recovery and reconstruction efforts, the sustained attention and contribution of the international community is vital. In that context, it is essential that international attention remain focused on the long-term impact of the disaster and on the need to reconstruct the infrastructure that can enable the millions of affected people to survive through the winter, rebuild their homes, schools, hospitals, livelihoods and rebuild their broken lives.

Pakistan hopes that the international community will support the medium- and long-term rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts of the Government and people of Pakistan. This will be a long and arduous task, spanning months and years. In that regard we welcome the generous pledges made by a number of Member States to the long-term reconstruction projects in the affected areas and look forward to the concrete expression of support at the reconstruction conference in Islamabad on 19 November.

To affirm the solidarity of the international community with all the victims of the earthquake disaster in South Asia, Pakistan has initiated the draft resolution, contained in document A/60/L.18. This draft is sponsored by 113 Member States, to all of whom the Pakistan delegation is most grateful. The purposes of the draft resolution, which I now have the honour to introduce on behalf of the sponsors, are self-explanatory.

The extensive list of sponsors is a demonstration of our solidarity as we stand together against the tragedies caused by such natural disasters and of our shared commitment to withstand their impact by a united force of the peoples of the United Nations.

May I take this opportunity to announce that in addition to the countries reflected in the document, the following additional Member States have joined as sponsors of the draft resolution: Armenia, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Brunei Darussalam, El Salvador, Haiti, Hungary, Grenada, Iceland, Ireland, Kyrgyzstan,

Micronesia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Timor-Leste, Ukraine and the United States of America. It is our hope that the draft resolution will be adopted unanimously by the General Assembly.

Disasters like the South Asian earthquake teach us some hard lessons, the primary one being that though we cannot prevent natural disasters, we can certainly work together to mitigate their devastating impact. We need a comprehensive strategy to achieve such disaster management — including early warning systems and disaster preparedness plans.

Secondly, the role of the United Nations and its disaster coordination machinery — the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) — as well as the role of the specialized agencies of the United Nations, with their specific expertise, is indispensable. This machinery needs to be strengthened to respond to such natural or human calamities. Even if support in such disasters is provided largely through bilateral channels, the United Nations overall coordination role is crucial, especially in the early stages of such catastrophes.

Thirdly, and most important, it is imperative that the United Nations be provided with adequate financial resources to respond quickly and effectively to such disasters. Pakistan fully endorses the Secretary-General's proposal for a $500 million Central Emergency Revolving Fund to be placed at his disposal for that purpose.

On other issues related to the agenda item, the Pakistan delegation associates itself with the statement to be delivered by the representative of Jamaica.

The President: I now give the floor to Mr. Vladimir Tsalko, Chairman of the State Committee on the issues of Chernobyl disaster consequences of the Republic of Belarus, to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.19.

Mr. Tsalko (Belarus) (*spoke in Russian*): On behalf of the sponsors I have the honour to introduce the draft resolution entitled, "Strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster", contained in document A/60/L.19. I am pleased to announce that since the draft was published, the following States have joined as additional sponsors: Austria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Cambodia, Cape Verde, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Germany, Haiti, Hungary, India, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Macedonia, Monaco, Myanmar, Norway, Peru, the Republic of Korea, Slovakia, Slovenia, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Compared to similar previous General Assembly texts, more than half of the provisions of this draft are new, thereby reflecting the dynamism of international cooperation on Chernobyl and the great number of events that have occurred in the area over the last two years. It also reflects the essential element: the beginning of a new stage in the development of international post-Chernobyl interaction. The main element of this stage is not the delivery of emergency humanitarian assistance but the comprehensive rehabilitation of the contaminated areas, including the renewal of socio-economic activity in those regions with a view to creating safe living conditions for people in the area.

Recently, we discussed that new United Nations strategy at the international conference in Vienna in September, within the context of the Chernobyl Forum. The draft resolution reflects our agreements, many of the provisions of which are directed towards the implementation of the recommendations of the main report of the Forum on the legacy of Chernobyl. I would like to note first the importance of the specialized medical, ecological, social and economic research into the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster.

The draft resolution aims to strengthen the United Nations coordination mechanism to organize international post-Chernobyl interaction, as well as to enhance the role of the United Nations Coordinator on Chernobyl in that mechanism. We are convinced that the United Nations Development Programme Administrator, Mr. Kemal Dervis, who was recently appointed to his post, will successfully implement the agreed approaches in this important matter.

The draft resolution also expresses support for the initiatives of the three affected countries — the Republic of Belarus, the Russian Federation and Ukraine — and is timed to coincide with the twentieth anniversary of the Chernobyl disaster. One of those initiatives is to convene a special meeting of the General Assembly in April 2006 to mark the twentieth anniversary of the disaster, not simply to speak again about our post-Chernobyl problems, but mostly for the

purpose of discussing and coordinating our further joint steps to improve the living conditions of millions of people in the contaminated territories, in particular the living conditions of children.

We would like to thank all States that have contributed so much to the improvement of the draft. It is now ready for consideration, and we hope it will be adopted by consensus, as was the case in previous years.

Now, in my national capacity, I would like to touch upon some issues that the General Assembly is considering today. For Belarus, whose territory received some 70 per cent of the radioactive fall-out as a result of the Chernobyl disaster, the problem of Chernobyl is the most topical. Even now, almost 20 years after the disaster, the entire range of post-Chernobyl problems continues to be a heavy burden on the shoulders of the people of Belarus. The area contaminated with long-lived radioactive nuclides constitutes 21 per cent of the country's entire territory. The population in that area continues to be subject to chronic internal and external irradiation because of the long-lived radioactive nuclides present in the environment.

The economy of those regions, especially as related to agriculture and forestry, is in a dire situation. Safe production technologies are needed. Our experts have been working for a long time in that area and have managed to develop a number of technologies, making it possible to produce products which meet non-contamination standards. We are ready to share that invaluable experience with other States.

The Republic of Belarus has already spent more than $17 billion on efforts to resolve the range of its post-Chernobyl problems, including the resettlement of 137,000 people. In order to comply with the next State programme for 2006-2010, we plan to allocate about $2 billion. However, State funding cannot fully cover the economic damage inflicted by the Chernobyl disaster, estimated by experts to be $235 billion.

The accident in Chernobyl is a disaster, the magnitude of whose consequences go far beyond the economic capacities of one State or even of a group of States. Therefore, it is very important to establish constructive long-term international cooperation with the United Nations carrying out liaison and coordination. It is important to be guided by the priority needs of the affected States; otherwise, international interaction will lose its efficiency, and the financial resources will be spent without producing the desired effect.

We are grateful to the United Nations Development Programme and the United Nations Children's Fund for giving the post-Chernobyl problems of Belarus due attention in the 2005 draft country programme documents for the next five years. We view this as a guarantee that the new United Nations strategy on Chernobyl will be successfully implemented in our country. The State and Government agencies of Belarus are prepared to engage in active cooperation with the organizations and agencies of the United Nations system on Chernobyl issues. We call upon donor countries to give the necessary financial support for the implementation of these country programme documents.

To implement the new United Nations strategy, an international conference entitled "Twenty Years after Chernobyl: Strategy for the Recovery and Sustainable Development of the Affected Areas" is scheduled to be held in Minsk on 19 to 21 April 2006. We invite all interested States and international organizations to take an active part in the lead-up to and the conduct of this important forum. The aim of it is to work out and agree on joint, coordinated actions by Governments of the affected countries and the international community for comprehensive rehabilitation of the affected areas in the territory for the next 10 years.

To put it plainly, we are talking about the economic survival of these regions. However, when considering the Chernobyl topic from the standpoint of economic recovery and sustainable development, we should not forget the long-term medical and environmental aftermath of the disaster. We are grateful to donor countries and to international organizations that have provided assistance in studying and overcoming the aftermath of the disaster. This particularly pertains to diagnosing and the early detection of oncological and cardiovascular diseases, in particular those that affect children. I would like to say that, at this stage, we have sufficient resources and capacity for treating children and adolescents within our country. We still need modern medical equipment, though, and we ask our donors to give priority attention to this area.

Like all peoples, we in Belarus are extremely concerned at the growing frequency of large-scale natural disasters that have been occurring in recent times in various parts of the world. Countries with which Belarus has had longstanding, close and friendly relations have suffered. The Chernobyl problem has heightened our awareness of the complexity of the situation in which our friends find themselves. Therefore, Belarus has co-sponsored draft resolutions on dealing with the consequences of the Indian Ocean tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan.

These natural disasters prompt two main conclusions with regard to the future. First, decisive action needs to be taken at all levels to implement the Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, which were adopted at the 2005 World Conference on Disaster Reduction. Particular attention should be given to establishing an international early warning and threat reduction system for natural disasters and for reducing the danger they pose.

Secondly, the financial capacity of the United Nations to react to emergency humanitarian situations urgently needs to be increased. We welcome here the efforts of the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, Mr. Jan Egeland, in particular his efforts to strengthen the Central Emergency Response Fund of the United Nations. The implementation of that initiative would make it possible for the United Nations quickly and adequately to provide assistance to countries that are going through humanitarian crises. It would also make it possible to increase financing for recovery measures to deal with the long-term consequences of large-scale natural disasters and technological catastrophes that have occurred over the last decade.

The President: I now give the floor to the representative of Malaysia, who will introduce draft resolution A/60/L.20 on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Mr. Hamidon (Malaysia): I shall be speaking first on behalf of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) under agenda item 73, sub-item (a); and then I will present a statement in my national capacity on sub-item (d).

I have the honour to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.20, entitled "Strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster" on behalf of the ASEAN member countries — namely Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam, and my own country, Malaysia, and the other sponsors who are listed in the draft itself.

Let me first begin by thanking the Secretary-General for his reports prepared under agenda item 73 on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance, and the strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations.

It has been proven time and again how vulnerable we all are to the violent and destructive forces of nature. Natural disasters and calamities have often hit us without prior warning. For most of the countries in the developing world, which lack sophisticated high-tech early warning equipment, natural disasters have inflicted untold misery, devastation of property and loss of human lives. As we have witnessed on many occasions, the impact of the destruction has placed a heavy burden on the social and economic fabric of the affected countries, particularly on the developing and least developed countries.

Many of us, in varying degrees, have experienced the struggle to rebuild and recover from the devastation in the aftermath of natural disasters. The struggle to cope and rebuild from the pieces of destruction would have been more painful and daunting, if not for the support and assistance that came in from around the world in the name of humanity. Facing the pain and suffering caused by natural disasters, the affected countries could only seek solace in the overwhelming expression of international cooperation, assistance, solidarity and sympathy. We recall with a deep sense of appreciation such demonstrations of humanity by Governments, rich and poor, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and individuals all around the world to offer a helping hand in the wake of the Indian Ocean earthquake and tsunami of 26 December 2004.

With a globalized media network, the response to that tragedy was quick and unprecedented, enabling international organizations, including the United Nations and other entities, to organize emergency assistance to reach the affected countries in due time. Once again, we would like to take this opportunity to

acknowledge our appreciation to the international community and the United Nations system for their support and assistance in saving thousands of lives and assisting millions of tsunami victims to rebuild their future. It is our responsibility to ensure the sustainability of international attention and the continuing support to the reconstruction efforts in the tsunami-affected countries, even though the issue no longer enjoys broad international media coverage.

Be that as it may, the Governments of affected countries on the Indian Ocean rim have continued working to fulfil their obligations regarding reconstruction and restoring normal life for their people. At the same time, efforts have been made to ensure that the necessary preventive measures are put in place to protect their people from such destructive forces in the future.

In this context, we have agreed to take the necessary measures, with the involvement of the international community, the United Nations system, international organizations, international financial institutions and civil society, as well as the private sector, as set out in General Assembly resolution 59/279 of 19 January 2005 on strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster.

In the implementation of the resolution, we are pleased to report that shelter programmes have been prepared and implemented, and that there were no major outbreaks of pandemic diseases in the affected areas. Nonetheless, we continue to be mindful of the remaining challenges in ensuring the full implementation of medium- and long-term rehabilitation and community-driven reconstruction.

We have to acknowledge that the task and the responsibility of the affected Governments to undertake the efforts of reconstruction and redevelopment of the areas and provinces devastated by the tsunami are far from easy. Nonetheless, the affected Governments are committed to ensuring that the reconstruction and redevelopment efforts are aimed at providing the people with a better future and safer environment, in line with the high expectations of their people and the donor community.

We have to be mindful that this is not only a challenge to the tsunami-affected countries, but also for the international community in ensuring a continued, effective management and coordination in the transition between humanitarian assistance and development.

There is a need to look at the broader agenda with the formulation of longer-term goals to assist the tsunami-affected populations. That would involve effective coordination among the Governments of affected countries, relevant bodies of the United Nations system, donor countries, regional and international financial institutions, civil society and the private sector in ensuring equity of assistance among the affected communities.

It is our expectation that both the tsunami-affected countries and the donor communities must remain committed to promoting transparency and accountability with respect to the channelling and utilization of resources, which will facilitate the long-term sustainability of the recovery and reconstruction efforts. Furthermore, the capacity of the United Nations and the international community to respond and to deal with emergency humanitarian situations in countries affected by natural disasters should be enhanced in order to address the problems promptly with greater capacity, quality and accountability.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has undertaken several steps to strengthen regional and national capacity. In that connection, ASEAN is pleased to inform that it has concluded the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response in July 2005. It is an agreement that facilitates response and disaster reduction activities in the region. In the same way, we also welcome the establishment of a Multi-Donor Voluntary Trust Fund on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, which will contribute to the setting-up of a network of early warning systems and to the building up of capacity of the region in dealing with natural disasters.

An ASEAN-United Nations seminar on humanitarian assistance and rapid response capacity was also held last October to identify concrete steps to enhance ASEAN's response capacity.

Against that background, I am pleased to introduce draft resolution A/60/L.20. We would like to thank delegations that have been cooperating with ASEAN and all those delegations that, by co-sponsoring the resolution, join ASEAN and the affected countries in voicing their concerns and interest with regard to this issue.

The draft resolution essentially proposes to update General Assembly resolution 59/279 of 19 January 2005, incorporating additional paragraphs from the Joint Asian-African Leaders' Statement on Tsunami, Earthquake and Other Natural Disasters, which was adopted at the Asian-African Summit of 2005, and from the report of the Secretary-General on strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction, recovery and prevention in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster (*A/60/86*), as well as from the World Conference on Disaster Reduction and other initiatives.

The updated resolution focuses on seven main aspects: first, the reaffirmation of the commitment of the heads of State and Government as reflected in the 2005 World Summit Outcome to work expeditiously towards the establishment of a worldwide early warning system for all natural hazards by building on existing national and regional capacities, such as the newly established Indian Ocean Tsunami Warning and Mitigation System; secondly, the continued support and generous contributions of the international community, particularly towards further rehabilitation and reconstruction; thirdly, the appointment of President Bill Clinton as the Secretary-General's Special Envoy for Tsunami Recovery and the expression of appreciation for the efforts undertaken by the Special Envoy; fourthly, the establishment of the Global Consortium for Tsunami-Affected Countries to sustain the political will of the international community to support medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk reduction efforts led by the Governments of the tsunami-affected countries; fifthly, the importance of transparency and accountability from the perspectives of donor and recipient countries; sixthly, requesting the Secretary-General to continue to explore ways to strengthen the rapid response capacities of the international community to provide immediate humanitarian relief, building on existing arrangements and ongoing initiatives; and finally, the importance of developing stronger institutions, mechanisms and capacities at all levels by promoting public education, awareness and community participation.

On behalf of the sponsors, I wish to inform you that a correction is needed in draft resolution L.20 before you. In the eleventh preambular paragraph, the phrase "a multinodal early warning system network" should be deleted and replaced with "an early warning system".

The eleventh preambular paragraph should then read:

> "*Welcoming also* the establishment of the Multi-Donor Voluntary Trust Fund on Tsunami Early Warning Arrangements in the Indian Ocean and Southeast Asia, which will contribute to setting up an early warning system and to building up the capacity of the region in dealing with natural disasters,"

In conclusion, I wish to express that ASEAN looks forward to the continuing support of the Member States of the United Nations for this important resolution and to the adoption of the resolution by consensus.

I now turn to the next part of my intervention, which is a national statement on sub-item (d) of the agenda item, entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people".

My delegation would like to express at the outset its appreciation to the Secretary-General for his report submitted under agenda item 73(d), entitled "Assistance to the Palestinian people", in document A/60/90.

It is clear to us from the report that the humanitarian situation and the daily living and socio-economic conditions in the occupied Palestinian territories have not improved since the last report. The report, especially paragraphs 8 through 13, contains revealing and disturbing accounts and figures concerning the deteriorating situation. The international community should be concerned with the situation in the occupied Palestinian territories, since it has been well documented in the reports by other United Nations agencies, in particular the Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (ESCWA), the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) and the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA).

Given the prevailing circumstances, the role played and efforts made by the relevant United Nations agencies, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian

Authority, and the World Bank, as well as other humanitarian organizations, in extending the necessary humanitarian and emergency assistance in the occupied Palestinian territories remain crucial and indispensable.

However, my delegation regrets that such assistance has been and continues to be provided under difficult circumstances, owing primarily to the repressive and restrictive measures imposed by Israel. My delegation concurs with the observation made in paragraph 58 of the report that those restrictions clearly violate established principles of international law and have resulted in increased costs for operational agencies, which are ultimately borne by the international community.

Unless significantly eased, such policies and measures will continue to pose serious obstructions to economic recovery and development opportunities for the majority of Palestinians. We wish to reiterate our call to Israel to allow unfettered access to staff members of United Nations agencies and humanitarian workers in the occupied territories, so that they can carry out their work effectively. As a matter of priority, Israel must ease restrictions and work closely with United Nations agencies, donor countries and humanitarian organizations to ensure that aid and development projects are delivered in a timely and comprehensive manner.

My delegation also wishes to reiterate its call to Israel to comply with the Advisory Opinion concerning the separation wall, rendered by the International Court of Justice in July 2004, and with General Assembly resolution ES-10/15. As highlighted in paragraphs 13 and 73 of the report (*A/60/90*), the separation wall and its associated regime has had, and will continue to have, an adverse impact on the humanitarian situation and the living and socio-economic conditions of the Palestinian communities affected by its construction and completion. The separation wall and its associated regime also pose, and will continue to pose, problems, in terms of movement and access, for staff members of United Nations agencies and humanitarian workers in carrying out their work in the occupied Palestinian territory.

My delegation commends the performance of all United Nations agencies for their efforts and for carrying out programmes to provide a variety of types of economic, humanitarian and social assistance to the Palestinian people and public institutions, as reflected, in considerable detail, in paragraphs 14 through 53 of the report. The remaining challenges, as well as the unmet and emerging requirements, as documented in paragraphs 67 through 74 of the report, require particular attention. We believe that all those efforts and programmes that have been identified by United Nations agencies could, if successfully implemented, create an environment that could contribute to the achievement of sustainable peace in the region. All of those efforts and programmes require financial and other resources. We urge the international donor community to continue to contribute generously to that cause. For our part, the Government and the people of Malaysia will continue to extend assistance, within our limited means and capacity, to the people of Palestine.

My delegation is pleased to note that, as called for by many delegations in the past, the relevant United Nations agencies and parties have established, and will continue to undertake, measures to harmonize and coordinate their humanitarian and emergency assistance efforts and programmes, under the coordination of the Office of the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority and with the participation of the Palestinian Authority.

My delegation welcomes the launch of a new media-related inter-agency coordination mechanism aimed at drawing attention to and providing information about the humanitarian situation in the occupied Palestinian territory and the United Nations presence in the region.

We need to understand that financial resources and other technical assistance made available to the Palestinians will not, by themselves, resolve the political crisis affecting the lives of the Palestinians. The solution remains to urge Israel to end the occupation and respect international law and relevant United Nations resolutions. We must achieve a peaceful resolution to the conflict based on a comprehensive political dialogue and follow-up to the parties' respective commitments and obligations under the road map. My delegation considers the Israeli disengagement from Gaza to be a positive move that could contribute to peace and stability and to economic improvement in the area.

In this connection, it is vital for both Israel and Palestine to establish and maintain close coordination within the context of the road map. Peace will remain elusive unless all parties concerned — those in the region and the wider international community — are prepared to play their part responsibly, in good faith and with a high degree of political will to seek a long-lasting peace.

Mr. Neil (Jamaica): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on agenda item 73, "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance", and sub-tem (a), "Strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations".

The past decade has seen a growing demand for United Nations humanitarian assistance. The increased frequency and severity of natural disasters affecting nearly all parts of the globe during the past year, in particular, has demonstrated our continued vulnerability to the vicissitudes of nature. As you, Mr. President, mentioned in your opening statement, we have witnessed the devastation caused by the tsunami in south Asia in late December 2004, a disastrous earthquake that struck south Asia this past October, with widespread destruction and loss of life affecting Pakistan, and the intensive and destructive 2005 hurricane season, which wreaked havoc in the Caribbean, Central America and the south coast regions of the United States.

Such situations are additional to long-standing complex emergency situations, while new ones are rising as a result of armed conflicts, many of them in developing countries. The frequency, changing nature and scope of such emergencies call for an increased response from the international community in terms of more resources and the provision of the requisite skills in disaster prevention and management.

Against that background, serious challenges have been posed for the United Nations humanitarian response mechanism. The need to strengthen its coordination and disaster-relief capacity, including special economic assistance, so as to ensure that all cases of emergency are given due attention and that relief supplies are based on the principles of neutrality, humanity and impartiality, is therefore of paramount importance.

Addressing the funding capacity of the United Nations system is one of the most critical steps in achieving the objective of improving the United Nations emergency-response capacity. The reliability and predictability of funding is essential, if we are to ensure that not only new and large-scale emergencies that capture the attention of the media, but also other humanitarian crises that are not given much publicity, receive attention. This all results in increasing demands on the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), which requires urgent review if it is to fulfil its purposes.

In this regard, we believe that one of the most significant decisions taken by our leaders at the High-level Plenary Meeting this year was their endorsement of the Economic and Social Council recommendations made in July this year to the General Assembly to improve the Fund.

The report of the Secretary-General on the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, contained in document A/60/432, makes some useful recommendations for improving the operations of the Fund. The Group of 77 and China supports the expansion of the Fund from its current base of $50 million to $500 million, and the inclusion of a grant component to support rapid response. This will, we believe, significantly contribute to achieving a more predictable, timely response to humanitarian emergencies.

We appreciate the contributions from the donor community, and we especially commend the members of the European Union, in particular the United Kingdom, which has made pledges towards the expansion of the Fund that we anticipate will materialize in 2006. Non-traditional donors, such as the private sector and the developing countries, are also to be encouraged, and we are particularly pleased at the steps taken by some developing countries in making pledges.

We look forward to further discussions on how best to continue to improve existing financial mechanisms, such as the flash appeals process, as well as a possible review of the allocation of resources from the regular budget to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) for more long-term humanitarian response, bearing in mind the projected needs.

Effective coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance requires cooperation between all stakeholders, including the United Nations system, and regional as well as national mechanisms. While acknowledging the coordinating leadership role of the United Nations, account should be taken of the role to be played by national Governments in identifying national priorities. The need for field-level coordination is of paramount importance. We welcome the announcement in July by the Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs of a programme for the training and capacity-building of resident and humanitarian coordinators, as well as to increase the pool of experienced candidates for the coordinator system, so as to allow them to draw upon a reserve of expertise in response to new crises.

The Group of 77 and China recognize that it is the primary responsibility of States to respond to the needs of their citizens in emergency situations. At the same time, international cooperation, not only in relation to the provision of funding, but also in terms of the sharing of best practices and the transfer of technology to developing countries, is also of great importance. Those should form part of a comprehensive package of response to the relief and development dimensions of humanitarian disasters.

The report of the Secretary-General in document A/60/227 addresses the issue of transition from relief to development. It makes some useful recommendations, including that the United Nations and donor Governments should enhance the level of preparedness of countries prone to natural disasters, particularly at the local level, by significantly increasing funding for preparedness activities. It also calls on Member States to implement the priorities set out in the Hyogo Framework for Action in support of the International Strategy for Disaster Reduction and, in particular, to incorporate practical disaster reduction steps into sustainable development and poverty reduction strategies, as well as disaster preparedness and response. We support that and other recommendations in the report.

We recognize the challenging role of the United Nations in responding to complex emergency situations. Efforts to respond to such situations must be balanced against the need to ensure the security and protection of humanitarian personnel. With that in mind, we welcome the efforts of the Secretary-General in establishing guidelines for complex missions and, at the same time, reiterate the need to ensure that humanitarian missions observe the relevant international legal instruments and principles in conducting multidimensional integrated peacekeeping missions.

We also take this opportunity to congratulate you, Sir, on the important contribution you made some years ago, in another capacity, in developing the framework for United Nations activities in humanitarian and disaster assistance. An important legacy of your involvement is resolution 46/182, which contains the guiding principles for the strengthening of the coordination of emergency assistance of the United Nations system. The Group of 77 and China reaffirm today the centrality of that resolution.

Finally, we take this opportunity to express our thanks and appreciation to Under-Secretary-General Egeland and his staff at OCHA for their outstanding and untiring efforts in coordinating humanitarian activities on behalf of the United Nations.

The President: I thank the representative of Jamaica for his words about resolution 46/182 and the basis it provides for the humanitarian work of the United Nations. Let me also, from this Chair, express my pride in having Jan Egeland as one of my successors in that important and sometimes sadly depressing function inside the United Nations.

Sir Emyr Jones Parry (United Kingdom): I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union (EU) and those countries that have aligned themselves with this statement.

The European Union would like to thank the Secretary-General for the reports submitted for consideration under this item. They clearly demonstrate the immense challenges faced by the humanitarian community in the last year, as well as the continuing need to provide more effective and predictable humanitarian assistance. The European Union would like to take this opportunity to express its condolences to and solidarity with all those affected by humanitarian emergencies in the last year. We would also like to thank all humanitarian personnel for their tireless and dedicated efforts to assist and protect vulnerable populations, often at great personal risk.

Events this year, most recently and starkly in Pakistan, have highlighted the importance of expanding and improving our capacity to respond

quickly and effectively to major disasters. The challenge to us all is to sustain our response and our commitment in the aftermath of a disaster. In Pakistan, the European Union is committed to supporting the United Nations renewed appeal for assistance with the ongoing tragedy as winter approaches. Similarly, the growing crises in southern Africa — often referred to as the triple threat — demonstrate yet again the urgent need for early preventative measures, with the clear lesson that early intervention is much less costly than responding later, once needs and suffering have escalated.

The European Union fully supports the Secretary-General's call in his report "In larger freedom" for a more predictable humanitarian response, including in the areas of standby arrangements, funding and coordination capacity. All of those elements are mutually reinforcing and must be pursued together.

In terms of standby capacity, the European Union values existing mechanisms, such as the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination teams, as well as the International Search and Rescue Advisory Group, but the EU also attaches great importance in terms of developing and sustaining disaster risk reduction, preparedness and response capacity at all levels. Experience has shown that more lives are saved in the aftermath of a disaster when response teams can deploy immediately, especially at the local and national levels. We recognize that the rapid response capacity of the international community still fails people in need of urgent assistance and we therefore call for enhanced support to the United Nations in its efforts to strengthen its response.

On funding capacity, we have been given a clear mandate from the Economic and Social Council and from world leaders at the September United Nations summit to improve the existing Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). We welcome the Secretary-General's report on the proposed modalities for an upgraded CERF, which should enable quicker and more effective responses to humanitarian emergencies, and hope that it will become operational early in 2006. We also welcome the announcement of pledges, in principle, towards an upgraded CERF and invite further voluntary contributions to the Fund. From the European Union perspective, it is essential that the Fund's accountability structures work retroactively in order to facilitate one of the primary objectives of the upgraded CERF — to respond immediately to life-saving needs. An upgraded CERF should provide a useful addition to existing fast-track disbursement procedures, such as those provided by the European Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office.

The persistent underfunding of some emergencies, particularly in Africa, is especially concerning. The proposal that the upgraded CERF address critical humanitarian needs in underfunded emergencies is therefore welcome.

On coordination capacity, often a complex challenge, the response to recent disasters has shown that there is always room for improvement. In that context, one particular aspect to which the EU attaches great importance is the quality of humanitarian coordinators. Further efforts must be made to improve that critical function, especially in terms of training and support, and the right incentives must also be provided to attract the best people for that crucial job. Further efforts must also be made to improve the quality of, and therefore donor confidence in, the United Nations Consolidated Appeals Process. The Process must provide for a more inclusive and better coordinated assessment of need, and the projects contained therein must be better prioritized.

As donor Governments, we also recognize that we need to enhance coordination amongst ourselves. That is why we are committed to the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. It provides an unparalleled opportunity to promote innovation and good practice in the way in which aid is provided and to enhance the predictability, adequacy and flexibility of humanitarian financing.

Lessons learned are also an important part of ensuring a more effective and predictable humanitarian response. In that respect, the European Union welcomes the Humanitarian Response Review. It has helped identify a number of gaps and weaknesses in the international response system, and we are pleased that the recommendations are now being actively pursued. In particular, the EU welcomes work already under way in identifying cluster, or sectoral, bids. We believe that is especially important in terms of ensuring sectoral capacity and leadership.

There are also a number of lessons to be learned in the use and coordination of military and civil defence assets. In some cases, the logistical support and expertise associated with such assets can prove

invaluable in terms of transporting relief assistance and in reaching remote and vulnerable communities.

The European Union fully accepts the need to make the international humanitarian system more predictable and effective in its response, including through lessons learned and the implementation of existing commitments. But those efforts will be in vain if we cannot ensure better respect for international humanitarian law, as well as reliable access and protection for civilians in need and for humanitarian workers. We strongly condemn attacks and acts of violence on humanitarian workers, which jeopardize not only their safety, but also the sustainability of relief operations. Such incidents must be immediately and effectively investigated and the perpetrators of such acts brought to justice.

Finally, this past year in particular has posed many challenges to the humanitarian community. We have not always risen to the challenge. We must therefore continue our efforts to improve the effectiveness and the predictability of humanitarian response. The European Union is determined to play its part to that end.

Ms. Rouse (Grenada): I have the honour to speak, on behalf of the States members of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) that are Members of the United Nations, on agenda item 73 (a), "Strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations, including special economic assistance: strengthening of the coordination of emergency humanitarian assistance of the United Nations".

The CARICOM members wish to associate themselves with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China on this agenda item.

The heads of State and Government, during the 2005 world summit, were in one accord regarding the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century. They reminded us that the problems facing the world had multiplied, natural disasters being one of them. We were also requested to seek new and innovative ways to deal with those problems, and hence we welcome the Secretary-General's reports on this agenda item.

We wish to make particular reference to the Secretary-General's report, contained in document A/60/432, on the improvement of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), especially the call to address critical humanitarian needs in underfunded emergencies. We applaud the proposal put forward by Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Emergency Relief Coordinator, for renaming the upgraded Fund as the Central Emergency Response Fund. We fully support efforts in the area of natural disaster mitigation, especially in the light of recent global trends. In commending the Emergency Relief Coordinator and his staff on their excellent performance thus far, we recognize the very difficult task which they face and resolve to continue our support for that department.

We recall General Assembly resolution 46/182 of 19 December 1991, which states that

> "International relief assistance should supplement national efforts to improve the capacities of developing countries to mitigate the effects of natural disasters expeditiously and effectively and to cope efficiently with all emergencies. The United Nations should enhance its efforts to assist developing countries to strengthen their capacity to respond to disasters, at the national and regional levels, as appropriate." (*resolution 46/182, para. 18*)

CARICOM member States are indeed pleased that the United Nations agencies have continuously provided necessary assistance over the years and we must pay particular tribute to the United Nations Development Programme in the Caribbean for its sterling support. However, with the increased magnitude and frequencies of disasters in the region, we recognize the need for further collaboration with other regional agencies.

The 2005 world summit resolved to fully implement the Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015, adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, in particular those commitments related to assistance to developing countries that are prone to natural disasters and disaster-stricken States in the transition phase towards sustainable physical, social and economic recovery, for risk reduction activities in post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation processes. We now have to ensure that this resolve is translated into action.

The CERF report clearly shows that the consolidated and flash appeals have been insufficient in meeting the needs of the various crises and

emergencies. The mechanism must be able to disburse funds in a rapid and transparent manner with the primary aim of saving lives and providing immediate humanitarian relief.

It is clear to this body that, in the near future, increased resources for rapid deployment of relief will be required and that it will therefore be necessary to establish not only a source of readily available funding, but proper mechanisms to ensure immediate access to those funds by disaster-stricken States.

CARICOM has noted with dismay the poor response to appeals following recent disasters in the Caribbean region, as was experienced by Grenada and Guyana, where the destruction impacted heavily on their economies. It saddens me to say that, to date, only a minor percentage of the pledges have been fulfilled.

CARICOM member States have, at several world summits and conferences, stressed the need for special and differential treatment for small island developing States due, in great part, to our vulnerability to natural disasters. The Secretary-General, in his report "In larger freedom", also made reference to the environmental and development challenges facing us in the form of climate change, recognizing that the countries that were most vulnerable included small island developing States.

We find ourselves in a unique position. Apart from our size, we are for the most part island States, and a region which is often visited by disasters brought about by wind, water or other forces of nature that threaten our very existence. We therefore make a solemn appeal to members of this body to join hands with us and work towards arriving at solutions to minimize the effects of those disasters, from which we have no means of escape. Small island States continually run the risk of being forgotten by the media and, in turn, by the international community, since our size does not attract sufficient attention. When Grenada was hit by Hurricane Ivan in September of 2004, it was the entire 344 square-kilometre island, with its 100,000 inhabitants, that sustained damage. All were affected. We are fully aware that preparedness is necessary. However, since we cannot prevent the disaster or predict its magnitude, the recovery process is therefore of paramount importance.

Disaster management is a complex portfolio, and though most countries have an established national disaster management agency, the magnitude of the disaster is sometimes way beyond their capabilities — hence the apparent state of paralysis which follows. We therefore welcome immediate intervention by the United Nations agencies when they are called upon to assist in such situations.

CARICOM wishes to commend those States that have pledged contributions to the Fund and encourage those that are in a position to do so to join the contributors' list. We are also grateful to those countries that have taken concrete steps in disaster mitigation and are working with CARICOM in that regard. CARICOM is pleased to lend its support to the upgraded Fund and to endorse the addition of a grant facility of $450 million, targeted at a total of $500 million, to be operational by early 2006. We also endorse the establishment of an advisory group of 12 experts, broadly representative of the humanitarian donor community, as well as technical expertise from countries affected by crises. We believe that that composition would contribute to a more balanced approach and be able to achieve better results.

We support the need for transparency, accountability and visibility of the Fund, the active involvement and guidance of the General Assembly, and the suggested annual CERF donors consultation in order to keep relevant partners updated and for necessary review. We are confident that, with strong and dedicated support from Member States, the newly revived Fund will be able to provide timely and more effective response to humanitarian emergencies.

In conclusion, CARICOM States resolve to work closely with the Emergency Relief Coordinator and other United Nations agencies to ensure the success of that new venture to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance.

Mr. Siv (United States of America): I thank the Secretary-General for his comprehensive reports on humanitarian assistance. They help us to maintain attention on continuing needs and to explore how the United Nations system can better work to meet them. As a prominent contributor and participant in humanitarian action throughout the world, the United States recognizes many successes in saving lives and reducing suffering, but we also clearly see areas where the international community can improve its collective response.

In the past year, we have faced tremendous challenges. Protracted civil conflicts have provoked

some of the largest occurrences of forced displacement in recent times. Natural disasters have also had a destructive impact of exceptional scale. This year's hurricane season hit my country very hard. I thank the United Nations and the international community for the generous contributions to the relief effort in the south-eastern Gulf States.

The international community, with United Nations leadership, has met many of the challenges in the past year, but humanitarian needs continue to require our collective will and capacity to provide a more efficient and effective response, both at the management and technical levels. Within the broader context of United Nations reform, much discussion has revolved around ways to improve the United Nations humanitarian response system. The United States supports a stronger and more effective response in humanitarian crises.

We have followed with interest the proposal for an improved Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). We believe that a centralized source of rapidly available funding could help effectively address urgent needs in rapid-onset emergencies and swiftly deteriorating crises. We look forward to further discussion on the operational modalities of the enhanced CERF and on how the Fund links to other initiatives, such as the Consolidated Appeals Process and the effort to standardize assessment methodologies. The approach to humanitarian reform should be comprehensive, aligning the benefits of the CERF alongside initiatives to broaden the donor base, secure additional voluntary resources, strengthen early warning systems, bolster response capacity, and enhance the overall coordination of disaster relief and mitigation efforts.

Financial resources are critical to addressing humanitarian needs, but effective response requires experienced humanitarian personnel on the ground making tough decisions, coordinating numerous actors and ensuring that the aid reaches persons most in need. Additionally, humanitarian personnel work in environments filled with enormous challenges, including lack of access, insecurity and difficult logistics. Those obstacles require that we prepare for and anticipate emergencies before they begin by training staff, increasing agency capacity to absorb additional funding, and better equipping responders to operate in challenging environments.

One clear lesson from the past year is that the United Nations system must be able to shift into emergency mode smoothly and efficiently when a situation deteriorates. The various operational components of the United Nations must be able to rapidly implement relief activities.

We have followed with equal interest recent discussions on reinforcing United Nations leadership for specific sectors of humanitarian activity — sectors that have historically suffered from ad hoc coordination and direction. We applaud initial efforts in that area and believe that, together, we can enhance the international response to meet needs in those critical sectors.

Perhaps the most pressing of those, and one that too often falls into a gap without sufficient leadership, is the protection of persons affected by natural disasters and civil strife. We support more coherent United Nations leadership in that area. Protection is a complex issue and involves a range of United Nations offices, other international organizations, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, and non-governmental organizations. Within the United Nations, we believe that recent refinements to the collaborative approach strengthen the framework for addressing the assistance and protection needs of internally displaced persons, and we challenge United Nations agencies to work further towards that goal.

The ability to provide protection to vulnerable populations is also closely linked to the safety of relief workers. Initiatives to enhance funding mechanisms and clarify leadership roles will seem extraneous if we fail to safeguard the basic security of humanitarian personnel. The United States applauds the efforts of humanitarian workers throughout the world and recognizes that their daily work brings relief and hope to millions of people in need. We must do everything we can to ensure that humanitarian personnel are able to continue their invaluable work without becoming the victims or the targets of conflict. In the past few months, we have seen humanitarian workers come under direct attack in Darfur and northern Uganda. That cannot be tolerated. The United States is committed to strengthening the security and safety of humanitarian personnel, and we view the measures taken by the General Assembly as important steps in allowing United Nations personnel and other humanitarian workers to continue their critical work.

I would like to express our appreciation to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs — which you, Mr. President, once led with distinction and which is now under the leadership of Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland — the other United Nations humanitarian agencies and fellow Member States for striving to seek improvements in the coordination of humanitarian assistance. As we continue those discussions, we must not address elements of humanitarian reform in isolation. Its components constitute a package that helps ensure that the allocation of resources is driven by solid needs assessments and prioritizations.

We reaffirm our support for the core humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality and independence. They provide the foundation for international humanitarian work and must continue to guide our efforts, especially as we strive to address the range of challenges we face today. Let us not lose sight of those straightforward yet profound values as we work together to strengthen humanitarian assistance to help the millions of people in need around the globe.

The United States is the largest single donor to humanitarian and development programmes that benefit the Palestinian people. Working within the United Nations system, our substantial financial contribution to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA) amounted to $108 million in 2005. Since 1998, we have contributed $588 million to UNRWA's General Fund in support of its educational, health, and employment programmes serving 4.2 million Palestinian refugees.

In addition, through the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), we have provided more than $1.7 billion in economic assistance since 1993. USAID operates six programmes for the benefit of the Palestinians: the promotion of democratic reform, infrastructure and water resources, the revitalization of the private sector, community services, health and training, and higher education. The United States encourages other countries, especially countries from the region, to increase their contributions to UNRWA's core budget and to other humanitarian and economic needs in that area.

The President: I particularly want to bring to the Assembly's attention the important work being done in the Sixth Committee on the safety and security of humanitarian personnel. I hope that we can conclude discussions soon and, by so doing, send a strong message on the importance of assuring the security and the safety of personnel serving the peoples around the world.

Mr. Ozawa (Japan): Japan believes that a holistic and comprehensive approach is necessary in our efforts to strengthen the coordination of humanitarian and disaster relief assistance of the United Nations. Funding arrangements are an important part of the issue, but we should put this matter in the perspective of the overall picture.

We congratulate the Secretary-General for his bold report concerning the improvement of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) (*A/60/87*). We also commend Under-Secretary-General Jan Egeland for his efforts to elaborate on the details of the proposal in his discussions with all regional groups. In essence, the proposal argues for a drastic transformation of the existing CERF. We are not ready to make pledges with respect to a reformed CERF, but we understand the good intentions behind the ideas and see some merits in the proposal. Japan will continue to participate seriously in the forthcoming discussions on that matter.

Japan believes that reform is also necessary in the areas of needs assessment and common strategy for humanitarian assistance. Without progress on those two fronts, an effective response is not really possible, even if there were sufficient financial resources and adequate assistance capacity.

The Niger food crisis is a case in point. The problem of insufficient funding has been aggravated by the tension between development policy goals on the one hand and humanitarian assistance requirements on the other. That tension hampered free food distribution for fear of distorting the local economy.

We have often discussed the gap between emergency relief and development. We think that this may not be a linear sequence of events. Even in a situation where efforts are focused on longer-term development, emergency relief may sometimes be needed, as we saw in the case of the Horn of Africa. We welcome intensified dialogue between humanitarian and development actors on ensuring timely needs assessment and achieving a common strategy for humanitarian assistance. In addition, in order to assess needs accurately, it is necessary to

ensure the participation of all stakeholders, including non-governmental organizations.

Japan also attaches great importance to the improvement of the coordination mechanism, in particular to the ongoing discussion on the cluster lead and the strengthening of the role of humanitarian coordinators. We welcome the recommendations of the Humanitarian Response Review on filling those gaps in the existing arrangements where responsibility for certain vital sectors for humanitarian assistance and protection remains unclear.

At the same time, the proposed cluster lead would require thorough discussion among humanitarian actors, including non-governmental organizations, as well as by the governing boards of all humanitarian entities, especially in terms of the proposal's impact on their core mandate. We hope that the Member States are kept up to date through consultations in the Inter-Agency Standing Committee. We believe it is also important to strengthen the role of humanitarian coordinators while at the same time fully reflecting the views of humanitarian workers, especially those on the ground.

Japan believes that engagement with emerging donors and the private sector needs to be further promoted with a view to expanding the financial resources available for humanitarian assistance. We need to consolidate the positive trend observed in the response to the Indian Ocean tsunami and the earthquake in Pakistan by promoting even closer dialogue with those contributors that used to be outside the humanitarian circle. In that regard, it might be worth considering, when a major humanitarian crisis occurs, setting up a briefing session in a format open to all Member States, possibly using the framework of the Economic and Social Council.

Last but not least, Japan wishes to emphasize the importance of prevention and preparedness, especially in the context of natural disasters. The Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action, adopted in January of this year, urge us to integrate risk reduction into post-disaster recovery and development strategies. Allocating relatively small amounts of resources to prevention and preparedness can lead to tremendous savings in terms of human lives and property.

I wish to conclude by expressing my Government's deep appreciation to all humanitarian workers, especially those on the ground helping people in need under difficult conditions.

Mr. Amorós Núñez (Cuba) (*spoke in Spanish*): At the outset, Cuba associates itself with the statement made by the delegation of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

Over the years, in the consideration of issues involving humanitarian assistance, priority has been given to complex emergencies, while natural disasters have been held to be of secondary importance. The peoples of various brotherly countries of the Indian Ocean basin had to suffer a catastrophe of enormous dimensions before United Nations action on that issue began to be reassessed.

The impact of the current hurricane season on the Caribbean Basin, the Gulf of Mexico and Central America and the disastrous effects of the most recent South Asian earthquake require a radical change in the mode of planning and coordinating humanitarian assistance in the United Nations system. Under these circumstances, we must reaffirm the validity of the principles of humanity, neutrality and impartiality enshrined in General Assembly resolution 46/182.

Although nature's fury does not distinguish between developing and developed countries, the consequences of the series of natural disasters in recent years reflect as never before the grave crisis underlying the international sustainable development agenda — a crisis faced by the countries of the third world, who suffer the ravages of the unjust conditions resulting from the current international order, which undermines national capacities to respond immediately to the enormous challenges posed by the effects of natural disasters.

It is therefore essential that humanitarian assistance be accompanied by a serious and unconditional commitment to economic growth and sustainable development in developing nations. Without that, contributions for humanitarian assistance — which must not be earmarked — only serve to undermine resources destined for international cooperation for development.

The current situation requires that the transition from relief to development receive the attention it deserves. Major efforts by the international community will be needed to enable those recovering from the damage caused by natural disasters to recommence

their national plans for viable economic growth and to continue making progress towards sustainable development, which will generate the resources needed for a long-term response to the earthquake's consequences.

In that connection, it will be crucial to undertake measures to restore socio-economic activity in the affected communities, such as cancelling, significantly relieving or rescheduling external debt, providing countries with a grace period that will help accelerate their relief, reconstruction and development efforts; promoting a common effort among various new and additional sources of financial resources for affected nations, including the international financial organizations, particularly the World Bank; and granting trade facilities and temporary trade preferences for specific national products — particularly those from disaster-affected areas — in order to help rebuild their productive capacities and support labour recovery. Other actions could be initiated through UNICEF, UNESCO and other bodies, agencies, funds and programmes of the United Nations system to support disaster-affected children — particularly those who have been orphaned — with the aim of promoting their physical and mental development.

Mr. Loizaga (Paraguay), Vice-President, took the Chair.

The growing magnitude of the negative effects of natural disasters requires the strengthening of national prevention, mitigation and preparation activities and the implementation of the outcome of the second World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held this year in Japan. However, international cooperation mechanisms must also be strengthened. The experiences suffered as a result of the hurricanes that battered the Caribbean Basin, the Gulf of Mexico and Central America confirm that.

Assistance provided in solidarity with those who need it is one of the essential pillars of our country's foreign policy, and our cooperation programme has been ongoing for more than 40 years. In that spirit, and because of the impact of Hurricane Katrina, the Henry Reeve International Contingent of Doctors Specializing in Disaster Situations and Serious Epidemics was established on 19 September 2005. Its members will provide assistance to populations requesting it, not only in natural disaster situations, but also in other emergency situations such as the outbreak of epidemics or to help in the global fight against HIV/AIDS. Henry Reeve members have already gone to Pakistan to provide medical assistance to the victims of the earthquake there and to Guatemala to aid the victims of Hurricane Stan.

Moreover, Cuban specialists will soon join the United Nations Disaster Assessment and Coordination Team. Cuba will contribute specialists and engineers, who will share Cuban national experience in assistance and emergency aid efforts, and doctors to save lives, ease pain, fight epidemics and provide essential health services for those who have lost everything and suffer the terrible effects of neglect. Their only reward will be to go home with the satisfaction of having done their duty. They will not demand the frivolous celebrity provided by coverage in the major international media. It is possible that they will receive no prizes or laurels for their humanitarian efforts; that is not what they seek. The gratitude of those whom they will heal and save will be enough for them.

The selfless solidarity of Cuba, a small, blockaded country of the third world, should serve as an example to spur other, immensely rich States and the international bodies to offer the necessary aid to those whom nature has harshly affected. It can be done; the suffering of the victims is in sharp contrast to the trillion dollars wasted annually on all kinds of armaments.

We need ongoing mobilization, a true spirit of human solidarity and a strong political commitment to solve the basic problems fuelling the incontrollable forces of natural disasters. Until that has been accomplished, the efforts of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance will be in vain.

Mr. Al-Shamsi (United Arab Emirates) (*spoke in Arabic*): Allow me, at the outset and on behalf of the delegation of the United Arab Emirates to thank the President of the General Assembly for his valuable efforts in directing the work of the present session. I should also like to thank the Secretary-General for his valuable reports on this agenda item.

I wish to associate myself with the statement made by the representative of Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China.

The recent unprecedented natural disasters and the magnitude of the destruction and death that they have caused in both developing and developed countries have undeniably proved two facts. First, developing countries are not prepared to deal with natural disasters. Thus the damage caused by such disasters is considerable, and recovery from their devastating effects is slow. Secondly, countries need one another, regardless of their capacities. Hence, international cooperation is the safest and most appropriate solution to protect humanity from natural disasters and from disputes and conflicts among individuals and nations.

In that context, we would like to express our appreciation and gratitude for the work done by the United Nations and its personnel in the field of delivering relief and humanitarian assistance, whether at Headquarters or at disaster sites, and we would underline the principal role of the United Nations in strengthening and coordinating long-term humanitarian and relief assistance to affected countries.

In the meantime, we reaffirm the importance of implementing the recommendations of international conferences on international coordination in facing disasters, which call for the implementation of an international strategy that deals with natural disasters at all stages, from early warning to relief, reconstruction and development. Such an international strategy must include the necessary measures required for helping poor countries to build their institutional capabilities and to address the consequences of natural disasters and war.

In that regard, we urge donor countries and international financing institutions to increase their contributions in order to fund humanitarian and relief activities, in fulfilment of the principles of international solidarity and interdependence, and in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations. We also emphasize the importance of settling disputes among nations and of eliminating the causes of armed conflicts, which have created humanitarian disasters, by strengthening the authority and role of international law.

The United Arab Emirates is one of the largest contributors to relief assistance activities in the world, as it has effectively participated in regional and international efforts aimed at providing long-term humanitarian and emergency relief assistance to all regions of the world. This has included providing contributions to United Nations humanitarian and development assistance agencies and extending direct financial and in-kind assistance to countries affected by natural disasters and armed conflicts, and for assisting in rehabilitation and reconstruction operations.

Total contributions made during the 2004-2005 period by the Government of the United Arab Emirates and the country's Red Crescent Society for reconstruction operations in Afghanistan, Iraq and some occupied Palestinian cities and for finalizing the fifth stage of the Emirates Solidarity Program for mine clearance in South Lebanon — which was completed in May 2004 and resulted in the removal of 61,829 mines in an area of 4 million square metres — have exceeded $500 million.

The Government of the United Arab Emirates has also assisted the victims of natural disasters in Iran and other countries of South-East Asia affected by the tsunami, as well as the victims of Hurricane Katrina and the recent earthquake in India and Pakistan. The Government has also extended direct development assistance to many developing countries through its national organizations, such as the Abu Dhabi Development Fund, which since its inception has provided financial assistance totalling $5 billion to 56 countries in the form of concessionary loans and grants.

The United Arab Emirates Red Crescent Society — the largest non-governmental charity agency in the country engaged in providing relief and foreign assistance — has extended total assistance in the year 2004 of 340 million dirhams, i.e. $100 million, to more than 95 countries, including those affected by, or recovering from, conflicts. The Society has also funded projects for rebuilding a number of Palestinian cities in the occupied territories for a total of $122 million.

As part of its international efforts aimed at supporting and coordinating humanitarian and relief assistance worldwide, the Government has established a relief warehouse in the city of Dubai for the provision of integrated services and facilities to national and international humanitarian organizations. It has recently established a supply warehouse for humanitarian assistance in Dubai that is used for storing pre-packaged American relief assistance material for immediate delivery to affected areas.

Following the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and the evacuation of some West Bank settlements, the international community expected to see some improvement in the tragic humanitarian conditions of the Palestinians. However, more than two months later, Palestinian living conditions have deteriorated miserably due to the continuing control of the Israeli forces over border checkpoints and commercial sites in Palestinian cities, as well as the continued imposition of repressive closure policies and restrictions on movement. Moreover, the continuing attacks on Palestinian citizens and their property and the policies of collective punishment policies and extrajudicial killings have resulted in the deaths of more than 4,000 innocent civilians, and tens of thousands more have been injured or disabled.

Moreover, Israel, the occupying Power, is continuing to build the illegal expansionist separation wall, which has resulted in the confiscation of Palestinian lands, the destruction of wells and an increase in the number of internally displaced persons. That has led to huge losses for the Palestinian economy, an increase in the number of Palestinian civilians, up to two thirds, who live under the poverty line, and the spread of malnutrition among large numbers of children.

According to international reports, the international humanitarian assistance provided to the Palestinians in the occupied territories is not adequate for alleviating their suffering. This can happen only if the Israeli occupation comes to a complete end and an independent and viable Palestinian State is established. We therefore call upon the international community once again to force Israel to immediately stop its attacks against civilians and to end its policy of closures and siege. It must cease building and dismantle the constructed part of the illegal expansionist wall, in accordance with internationally binding resolutions and the principles of international humanitarian law, including the Fourth Geneva Convention and human rights instruments, and to withdraw completely from all Arab territories occupied since 1967, in accordance with the relevant international resolutions. In the meantime, we urge donor countries and international financial institutions to continue providing necessary assistance to the Palestinian people until the Palestinian occupied territories are liberated and an independent Palestinian State is established, with Al-Quds Al-Sharif as its capital.

Ms. Smith (Australia): Please allow me to begin by again extending the Australian Government's condolences to the people affected by the South Asian earthquake, particularly in Pakistan.

The South Asian earthquake is the most recent in a string of severe and devastating natural disasters, including the Indian Ocean tsunami and numerous hurricanes and cyclones. Australia, as a country that itself is prone to natural disasters, is acutely aware of the threat they pose and of the importance of disaster mitigation and preparedness. If 2005 has taught the world anything, it is that disaster mitigation and emergency preparedness must be an even higher priority and must be integrated into development planning.

In the year since we last met to discuss humanitarian action, while there has been massive devastation and loss of life, there have also been incredible stories of survival and resilience. We would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the international humanitarian community for its efforts in rising to the unprecedented challenges it has faced over the past 12 months. This includes in particular Australia's recognition of those national authorities that have worked courageously towards rebuilding their communities, restoring human dignity and alleviating the suffering of their peoples. This, we think, highlights the importance of building national capacities within the humanitarian system.

Australia continues to play its part in humanitarian response. We provide rapid and generous support for the survivors of crises and disasters, both within our region and globally. Most recently, Australia has provided assistance to Pakistan, and earlier this year we responded rapidly to the Indian Ocean tsunami.

Farther afield, we have also assisted the responses to protracted crises in Africa, including in the Sudan, the Niger, Malawi and in southern Africa more broadly.

While the international system has responded to many natural disasters over the past 12 months, those disasters have also served to remind us just how crucial effective and timely humanitarian response capacity is,

if lives are to be saved, livelihoods protected and communities restored.

I should also make clear that we recognize that it is not just in the case of natural disasters that the humanitarian community must be able to respond, but also in complex emergencies, where there are many unique challenges. The complex environments in which we undertake humanitarian action highlight the need to continue to strive for a strengthened humanitarian response.

Strengthening humanitarian response is the key objective of the current humanitarian reform agenda outlined by the Secretary-General and led by the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA). Australia is a strong supporter of humanitarian reform. Our interest is in demonstrated results on the ground and our goal is to better enable affected communities to rebuild their lives and restore dignity.

We seek to achieve this through increasingly effective application of resources and heightened levels of coordination and collaboration between partner Governments and humanitarian institutions. Good progress has been made in a number of areas. However, we should continue to strive for further improvement. We encourage the United Nations to continue to build coordination and collaboration links during quiet periods as well as during times of crisis.

We agree with the key elements of the reform agenda. We need improved capacity, improved coordination and improved financing. We see them very much as an interdependent and interconnected package. Each element is, if you will, a leg of a three-legged stool. All elements of the agenda must be taken forward at the same time; none can stand alone. Our stool needs three strong legs.

The Australian Government considers more effective coordination, in particular a stronger Humanitarian Coordinator system, essential to improving response. We are eager to hear more from OCHA on the progress of this work. Similarly, steps to improve the capacity of the system and of individual agencies to respond in key sectors is important — we are watching with interest the use of the sector lead model in Pakistan and are looking forward to an update from agencies on this and other efforts to improve capacity. Finally, but no less important, we agree that humanitarian financing has to be more timely and predictable. A key initiative to this end is the upgrade of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF). We support, in principle, the CERF; we are encouraged by the contributions that donors have made to date and, subject to further discussions on its operation, are considering an Australian contribution.

We stand ready to work with OCHA, other humanitarian agencies and other donors to ensure that our humanitarian reform stool is strong and sturdy. We also continue to be strong and unequivocal supporters of the key principles of humanitarian action. We are committed to continuing to work with others to ensure the protection of civilians, unimpeded access for humanitarian actors and the importance of an effective approach to protect and provide assistance for internally displaced persons. In this spirit, we encourage stakeholders to continue dialogue through a truly collaborative framework to improve the relevance, effectiveness and responsiveness of humanitarian action.

Finally, I would like to highlight the important issue of the transition from emergency support to development. The challenges of this phase cannot be underestimated, as we have seen in the aftermath of the tsunami. Coordination, capacity and financing are also critical during this period, and we must all work together to ensure that transition is managed as effectively as emergency response.

Mr. Chulkov (Russian Federation) (*spoke in Russian*): This year is a special one for the international humanitarian community. We are on the threshold of decisions that should qualitatively improve existing mechanisms and instruments for international humanitarian cooperation. After more than a decade, we once again draw the conclusion that additional measures of a global nature are needed to enhance this work.

In particular, we are discussing an important aspect of international cooperation, namely the health and epidemiological consequences of disasters. Russia, within the context of its presidency of the Group of Eight in 2006, intends to devote constant attention to this question.

In the aftermath of the disasters caused by dangerous natural phenomena that we have experienced this year and last year, it has become clear that practical steps are needed to strengthen the capacity to react to disasters, so that upon requests from Governments we can quickly launch a

humanitarian operation in any part of the globe with the right management capacity, on the basis of preliminary comprehensive needs assessments and making use of cutting-edge technologies and services in this area.

In order to cope with this job effectively, Member States need to improve humanitarian coordination mechanisms at all levels. We consider that assigning a United Nations Humanitarian Coordinator or Resident Coordinator with the appropriate authority to coordinate the humanitarian agencies working in the field would serve to provide a better humanitarian response. However, we believe that this work can be effective only if there is a strong partnership between the United Nations country team and the host Government. The same also applies to post-conflict peacebuilding and rehabilitation, where the role of Humanitarian Coordinators and Resident Coordinators has been reassessed. Their appointment in multidimensional peacekeeping operations as Deputy Special Representatives of the Secretary-General in the field can enhance effectiveness and the smooth transition from a humanitarian assistance operation to development activities, which we see as a guarantee of success for the whole set of efforts relating to international humanitarian activities, post-conflict peacebuilding and the establishment of a basis for dynamic socio-economic development.

These measures cannot be taken without a change of attitude towards the question of funding international humanitarian activities. Stable access to financial resources is essential for expeditious and proper humanitarian disaster response and for dealing effectively and in a timely fashion with the consequences of complex emergencies. And here we agree with the assessment of the Secretary-General, that the current system for funding humanitarian activities has placed certain restrictions on the ability of humanitarian organizations to mobilize quickly the resources they need. A source of predictable humanitarian funding is needed to ensure timely assistance to those in need. Although we continue to regard the inter-agency consolidated appeals process as the main mechanism for mobilizing financial resources, we agree that these goals can be achieved through a reorganization of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, by adding a grant component.

We support the basic parameters for the reorganization of the Fund as well as its objectives, which are to facilitate a rapid response to people's needs at the early stages of humanitarian operations and to give special attention to so-called forgotten or chronically underfunded emergencies. We agree with a phased approach to its reorganization.

However, in order to give a certain degree of independence to the functioning of the renewed Fund and the entire global humanitarian machinery, we think that it is extremely important to have criteria on which this work would be based, taking into account that we are talking about fundamental changes in its functioning. Accordingly, we deem it exceptionally important that these criteria be agreed upon within an open-ended intergovernmental process. That would lend greater legitimacy to the future activities in the operational management of the Fund.

The United Nations and its Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) play a key role in efforts to strengthen international humanitarian cooperation. We believe that OCHA should continue to give priority attention to the fundamental principles for the provision of humanitarian assistance — that is, humanity, neutrality and impartiality, as well as independence. This fully applies to the challenges on the agenda of the humanitarian community. We cannot allow situations to arise that would undermine the trust of Member States in these principles.

Nowadays, the need to forecast emergency situations and for disaster preparedness is becoming increasingly evident. Here, we support measures to strengthen mechanisms for planning for and dealing with emergency situations caused by disasters. We call for stronger national systems for early warning, damage assessment and the mitigation of the consequences of disasters, as well as for more international cooperation in this area. All these measures were considered at the Hyogo World Conference on Disaster Reduction held in January 2005.

We support the work being done by UNESCO and the Intergovernmental Oceanographic Commission to launch a regional Indian Ocean tsunami early warning system. We view this system as an important stage in the establishment of a global disaster early warning system. Accordingly, we look forward to the Third International Conference on Early Warning, to be held Bonn next March.

This morning the representative of Belarus introduced for consideration by the Assembly a draft resolution on the strengthening of international cooperation and coordination of efforts to study, mitigate and minimize the consequences of the Chernobyl disaster (*A/60/L.19*). Nearly 20 years after the tragedy, this problem is still very much with us, because the consequences of the disaster continue to negatively impact upon people's health and the environment and hamper the steady socio-economic development of the affected areas of Belarus, Russia and Ukraine. A key element of the policy of the Russian Government regarding Chernobyl is the consistent integration of the radiation factor in activities to ensure the full recovery of affected areas, the cost of which, in our country alone over these years, has exceeded $5 billion.

This work has yielded results. The main emphasis now is on the socio-psychological rehabilitation of the population and the creation of a solid foundation for the sustainable development of the affected areas. A firm scientific foundation for the recovery strategy is important for dealing successfully with the consequences of the disaster. We are pleased that our own experience here is consistent with the conclusions of authoritative scientific forums. This applies, first of all, to the outcome of the Chernobyl Forum, which took place in Vienna last September under the aegis of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Clearly, the recommendations of the Forum will be very useful for us. However, I wish to emphasize that work to test and to coordinate the results of scientific research will still be relevant in the future.

International cooperation on Chernobyl is multifaceted and, throughout all these years, has been of great practical importance. We are pleased with the attention given by the world community to this problem through the development of scientific contacts, the provision of assistance in the area of public health, and the support we have received for our efforts to rehabilitate our agriculture and to establish information exchange networks. We would view the consensus adoption of this draft resolution as a demonstration of the solidarity of the international community with the work of the affected countries and the willingness to continue to give Chernobyl necessary international attention.

A special catalytic and coordinating role is traditionally assigned to the United Nations here, particularly to the United Nations Development Programme, which last year assumed the functions of coordinating international cooperation in this area. We express gratitude to the leadership of the Programme for the high level of interaction in achieving our common goals to improve the lives of the people in the affected territories.

We would also like to say from this rostrum that we support the two other draft resolutions, on strengthening emergency relief, rehabilitation, reconstruction and prevention, one in the aftermath of the South Asian earthquake disaster (*A/60/L.18*), and the other in the aftermath of the Indian Ocean tsunami disaster (*A/60/L.20*). The Russian Federation is a sponsor of both, and we hope that all delegations will support all three draft resolutions currently being considered.

Mr. Latheef (Maldives): The frequency and magnitude of natural disasters occurring all over the world are increasing at an alarming rate. Those that occurred in the past year alone are testimony to this reality. These disasters have caused immeasurable devastation and taken a heavy toll in terms of human lives and property. The suffering and pain they leave behind are deep and long-lasting. The burdens imposed on individuals, communities and countries are enormous, and the challenges at the national and international levels are formidable.

Natural disasters know no boundaries. They impact indiscriminately on both the poor in the South and the rich in the North. Harsh weather conditions are experienced by millions of peoples all over the world, causing despair and suffering. However, the level of a country's development has a bearing on the degree to which such suffering can be sustained. Small, less developed countries such as my own suffer more severely due to their weak infrastructure, limited resources and their inability to recover.

Although the loss of life and extent of damage in my country in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami were small in quantitative terms, compared to others affected by the disaster, it has now become evident that in economic and relative terms, the impact of the tsunami on the Maldives is far worse, primarily as a result of the country's narrow economic base. More than 62 per cent of the gross domestic product was totally destroyed, and development progress — a blessing over the past two decades — has now been

thwarted. Over 7 per cent of the population remain internally displaced, while a third of the entire population need help. Twelve islands need complete resettlement, while the socio-economic infrastructure must be rebuilt in more than one quarter of the inhabited islands.

As we approach the first anniversary of the tsunami disaster, the country's situation has not improved. It is now clear that it will take time for the country to regain the level of development progress that it had enjoyed before the disaster struck.

Resettlement and rehabilitation of displaced communities remains a daunting task. Providing permanent shelter and rebuilding livelihoods require careful community consultations in order to avoid any involuntary resettlement. This has been one important reason for slowing down the pace of implementing the programme. At the same time, the capacity of the Government, due to the limited human resources available, as well as the logistical difficulties of inter-island transportation, are also proving to be major hurdles in the implementation of the recovery and reconstruction programme. Proper training and technical assistance in local capacity-building is therefore now a priority for us.

There is also a major funding gap in our national recovery and reconstruction programme. Of a total of $470 million estimated for the programme, nearly one third has yet to be pledged. It should be noted that the Maldives is the only country experiencing an unpledged funding gap for tsunami recovery plans. While we express our sincere appreciation to our development partners and to the entire international community for the most generous assistance that they have already extended to us, we would like to call upon the international community for further support to help us bridge this funding gap as soon as possible.

Our economy, which had been growing at an average of 7 per cent per annum during the past two decades, is now expected to register a 3 to 4 per cent negative growth rate this year. Rising oil prices, unforeseen tsunami-related expenditures and revenue shortfalls from the tourism sector are creating significant, alarmingly intense fiscal pressures. As a direct result, we are now faced with an acute financial crisis for the first time in our history, and we are forced to appeal for budgetary support from our partners and friends. This assistance is in addition to the funding we require for our recovery and reconstruction efforts.

Addressing the challenges unleashed by natural disasters of such epic proportions requires urgent and timely action by the international community on an epic scale as well. Shifting from emergency disaster response to more proactive disaster prevention, risk reduction and mitigation will, in our view, be the key to success. A more comprehensive and coordinated approach to disaster management needs to be developed. Disaster risk management, rather than ad hoc humanitarian issues, should become an integral part of our long-term development policies. The full implementation of the Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015 would, we believe, contribute to that end.

We also call on the international community to make every effort to ensure the setting up of the Indian Ocean tsunami early warning system, as well as the worldwide multihazard early warning system, as soon as possible. My country, the Maldives, pledges its readiness to do its utmost to make this a reality, since we believe that such a system will not only save lives in such disasters but also help economies such as ours, which depend on tourism for their survival, to enhance confidence in the industry.

The central role of the United Nations in extending humanitarian and disaster relief assistance cannot be overemphasized. The rapid response of the United Nations in the wake of natural disasters last year, in particular the Indian Ocean tsunami, was remarkable and deserves much praise, recognition and admiration. The critical role being played by Secretary-General Kofi Annan and Under-Secretary-General and Emergency Relief Coordinator Jan Egeland and his dedicated staff at the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs are worthy of mention.

We believe that further strengthening the Organization's rapid response capacity should be a priority for the international community. Only a well-staffed, well-funded and well-equipped system can ensure the ability to respond promptly and effectively. In this regard, the Maldives fully supports the proposal of the Secretary-General for improving the Central Emergency Revolving Fund, since we sincerely believe that it would further contribute to strengthening the Organization's coordination and humanitarian response capacity.

The Special Envoy of the Secretary-General for Tsunami Recovery, His Excellency Mr. William Jefferson Clinton, and his able team have brought a much-needed boost to the efforts of the United Nations to help the countries affected by the tsunami. We sincerely thank President Clinton for his untiring commitment to this cause.

Transparency, proper coordination and accountability are crucial for achieving better and faster results. In this regard, my country is extremely pleased with the work being done by the Global Consortium for Tsunami-Affected Countries, set up by Special Envoy President Clinton. We believe this important tool will help sustain the political will of the international community to support medium- and long-term rehabilitation, reconstruction and risk reduction efforts by the affected countries. We are also happy with the financial tracking system, known as the Development Assistance Database, now in place in the region, including the Maldives. We are convinced that it will ensure the much-needed financial transparency and accountability and boost the confidence of the donor community and private contributors.

International efforts in providing humanitarian assistance and disaster risk management need to be supplemented at regional and subregional levels. Regional cooperation can play an important role in this regard. We are happy to note that in the South Asia region, which has experienced two of the world's worst natural disasters in a matter of ten months, the thirteenth summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), which concluded yesterday in Dhaka, highlighted the importance of cooperating in disaster preparedness and disaster management and decided to establish a regional disaster management centre in India. We believe that centre will boost confidence in the region and help realize the early establishment of an early warning system. Thanks go to the Indian Government for taking the initiative.

Over the past two decades, the Government and the hard- working people of the Maldives, with the most generous help from the international community, have transformed the Maldives into a vibrant country. As members are aware, just six days before the tsunami struck, the General Assembly decided to remove the Maldives from the list of Least Developed Countries, primarily on the basis of the country's performance in development. At that time, the country's gross domestic product was growing at a remarkable rate and our future looked very promising. We were also among the few countries on track to achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

However, with the devastation caused by the tsunami, our situation has become very dire. Instead of proceeding with the smooth transition process after having graduated from the list of least developed countries, we are now totally tied up in the enormous task of recovery and reconstruction. We have no choice. While it is difficult to determine an exact time frame required to reach pre-tsunami levels, we assure the international community that we will once again, with their generous assistance, recover and rebound from this disaster in the shortest possible time and proceed with the graduation process as recommended.

We are most delighted that the international community has heard our plea for help and has agreed to postpone the commencement of the smooth transition period for three years, which we think is reasonable. We understand that the Assembly will take the formal decision in that regard shortly. We sincerely thank the international community, the members here, for the understanding and solidarity they have extended to us.

Humanity has the power and ability to limit, manage and prevent natural disasters. Ironically, it also has the power to cause disasters. The tool we need to limit, manage and prevent disasters is political will. If we can fulfil just our commitment to protect and preserve the global environment, achieve sustainable development and reduce and eliminate poverty — a commitment we have all undertaken at various summits and conferences over the past decade — that would, in our view, make a world of difference.

Mr. Yao Wenlong (China) (*spoke in Chinese*): The Chinese delegation would like to express its appreciation to the Secretary-General for the reports he has submitted under the current agenda item. We associate ourselves with the statement made by Jamaica on behalf of the Group of 77 and China. Here, I would like to make three points in connection with this agenda item.

First, with regard to strengthening the coordination of United Nations humanitarian assistance, in recent years the world has been hit by frequent major natural disasters. The Indian Ocean tsunami and the recent massive earthquake in South

Asia took the lives of hundreds of thousands of people and resulted in huge losses to many countries. In addition, the floods, hurricanes, snowstorms, locust infestation and droughts that have occurred across the globe have caused widespread devastation and a loss of livelihood for hundreds of millions of people. The frequency of natural disasters has increased demands for the humanitarian assistance provided by the international community and severely challenged the capacity of the United Nations humanitarian assistance system.

However, the level of relief operations in the wake of the Indian Ocean tsunami and the South Asia earthquake has demonstrated the immense potential of the international community, as well as the important role of the leadership and coordination of the United Nations in that regard. The Chinese delegation commends Under-Secretary-General Egeland and the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) under his leadership, for their tireless efforts in securing emergency funding and in providing and coordinating humanitarian assistance. We will, as always, support the work of OCHA.

Since more and more organizations and agencies are taking part in humanitarian assistance work, it becomes ever more important that relief assistance to disaster-affected countries and areas be well coordinated. Therefore, it is necessary to further strengthen the leading role of OCHA and the resident coordinators for humanitarian assistance to enable them to work effectively in coordinating the relief activities of the relevant bodies and agencies of the United Nations system, non-governmental organizations and civil society. It is important to clearly define their respective responsibilities in order to reduce overlap and to help Governments of affected countries make the best use of international assistance in their post-disaster relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts.

Secondly, emergency humanitarian assistance entails substantial funding requirements. Both the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) and the Consolidated Appeal Process, established in accordance with General Assembly resolution 46/182, have played an important role in the last decade or so.

The CERF has guaranteed timely funding for relief agencies so they may respond promptly to emergencies. The Consolidated Appeal Process has been an effective financing and planning mechanism for United Nations humanitarian assistance agencies. However, the funding provided through that channel has been steadily declining in recent years, severely hampering the relief, recovery and reconstruction efforts of disaster-affected countries. Here, the Chinese delegation would like to appeal to donor countries that have the means to do so to demonstrate generosity and make more funds available for humanitarian assistance to disaster-affected developing countries, especially the least developed countries.

The recommendations for upgrading the CERF, as proposed by the Secretary-General in his report (*A/60/432*), are an important and integral part of the reform programme for humanitarian assistance operations and are of positive significance to the further strengthening of United Nations humanitarian relief coordination and response capabilities.

Concerning the proposed Central Emergency Response Fund, further details need to be articulated with regard to the scale of financing in the grant component, recommendations for loan and grant facilities, the operation of the Fund, and its administration and management procedures. It is very important that all countries show their support in that regard, and we hope that through joint efforts, the Fund will be able to begin operations and achieve expected results.

Thirdly, strengthening international and regional cooperation is an effective means to respond to natural disasters. When providing assistance to affected countries, the international community should also pay attention to their capacity for dealing with natural disasters. It is important to help central and local governments of disaster-affected countries build up their capacities in disaster prevention, relief and management.

While ensuring that relief assistance is properly delivered, attention should also be given to disaster prevention and reduction, including helping the affected countries develop medium- and long-term plans for disaster reduction and establishing national and regional mechanisms for the monitoring, prevention and assessment of major disasters.

The United Nations enjoys clear advantages in the areas of disaster prevention, relief and reduction. It has extensive experience in policy formulation and programme design and implementation and has well-

established mechanisms. Hence it should play a greater role in the future.

China is also a disaster-prone developing country. This year, floods alone have affected more than 200 million people and resulted in direct economic losses of $17 billion. Even so, the Chinese Government has, to the extent of its capacity, provided emergency humanitarian assistance to other disaster-stricken countries. The Chinese Government provided assistance in kind and cash valued at $83.1 million to countries affected by the Indian Ocean tsunami, including a $20-million donation provided through the United Nations multilateral system. In the immediate aftermath of the massive earthquake that struck Pakistan, the Chinese Government provided emergency humanitarian assistance totalling $6.2 million in cash and kind and dispatched search-and-rescue teams to the disaster areas.

In addition, the Chinese Government has provided $500,000 and relief goods worth 500,000 yuan through the United Nations system. All of that is a clear demonstration of the sympathy, solidarity and friendship of the Chinese Government and people with the Governments and peoples of the affected countries. The Chinese Government will continue, together with other countries, to actively participate in international and regional cooperation in disaster prevention, relief and reduction. We will do our part to help disaster-affected countries overcome natural disasters, rebuild their homes and return to normalcy.

Mr. Chimphamba (Malawi): I have the honour to take the floor on agenda item 73(a) on behalf of the Southern Africa Development Community (SADC) members Angola, Botswana, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lesotho, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Namibia, the United Republic of Tanzania, Swaziland, South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and my own country, Malawi.

Let me thank the Secretary-General for the informative reports before the Assembly that ably outline the progress made and challenges remaining in the efforts of the United Nations to coordinate and strengthen humanitarian emergency assistance at all levels.

In the last 12 months alone, the entire global community has witnessed a series of particularly large and destructive disasters requiring rapid and coordinated humanitarian interventions. Those disasters have reminded us all of the vulnerability of human life to natural disasters and also of the disproportionate effects they have on poor people. Clearly, more determined efforts are required to address the loss of livelihoods and quickly bring the situation back to normalcy.

SADC would like to stress the importance of the discussions of humanitarian policies and activities in the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council. We would like to stress that the resolutions and decisions adopted in these meetings can be meaningful only if Member States ensure their full implementation.

While acknowledging the various serious crises in other parts of the world, I would like to focus on the drought-induced food insecurity situation in a number of SADC countries. The Secretary-General, in his report contained in document A/60/89, notes that the humanitarian community vowed after the 1992-1993 drought that it would never allow a similar food insecurity situation to happen again. However, a decade later, a regional crisis of immense proportions has happened again.

Clearly, something was missed in the responses. Our view is that the United Nations response must be either entirely different or radically scaled up in order to make a difference in supporting national and community capacities to enable a multisectoral response to the current and future humanitarian crises. We also believe that communities and households must be placed squarely at the centre of programme design, analysis and implementation. SADC would like to render its full support to the notion that the dichotomy of humanitarian and development assistance must be overcome and replaced by more innovative and simultaneous humanitarian and development action that takes into consideration the short-term shocks and the long-term challenges.

In view of that, besides launching regional appeals for food aid, SADC is focusing on programmes aimed at mitigating the food insecurity situation in the long term, including operationalizing the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan and, in particular, the formulation of the Food Agriculture and Natural Resources Business Plan. In addition, SADC is focusing on increasing sustainable agricultural financing and investment in line with the African

Union Maputo Declaration on Agriculture and Food Security of July 2003.

Over and above emergency interventions under the Regional Humanitarian Strategic Framework for Southern Africa, the humanitarian community is mounting its response through country-specific initiatives, including flash appeals and consolidated appeals. A number of donor Governments have responded favourably to the appeals and we are grateful for that. Of concern, however, is the fact that the appeals remain critically underfunded. We would therefore like to appeal to the international community to urgently address the shortfalls.

SADC applauds the Special Envoy for Humanitarian Needs in Southern Africa, Mr. James Morris, for the special work he is doing in raising the awareness of the international community on the current situation and its underlying causes. We note with appreciation the work done to develop the inter-agency regional humanitarian strategic framework for southern Africa. That is an initiative that needs the meaningful support of the international community, especially given that it takes short-term responses into consideration, whilst preventing and mitigating future vulnerabilities.

Indeed, the experience of the donor response to the Indian Ocean tsunami of 26 December, 2004, clearly indicated that donors are capable of large-scale, fast and flexible response. It is our sincere hope that the donor community will maintain the high standards so established as it goes about addressing any crisis, humanitarian or otherwise, regardless of its magnitude.

We recognize the important role of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) and would like to urge it to continue to make efforts to broaden its donor base. It is our view that the Office should benefit from adequate and more predictable funding. We therefore appeal to the donor community to support OCHA generously.

SADC takes note of progress made by donors to improve their policies and practices of good donorship, including under the Good Humanitarian Donorship initiative. We believe that this is a positive initiative which, when implemented, should enhance the delivery of humanitarian assistance. SADC would also like to underline the importance of international cooperation on humanitarian assistance in the field of natural disasters, from relief to development. In that regard, we would like to endorse the recommendations contained in the Secretary-General's report (*A/60/227*).

We welcome the Hyogo Declaration and the Hyogo Framework for Action 2005-2015: Building the Resilience of Nations and Communities to Disasters, adopted at the World Conference on Disaster Reduction, held in January 2005, which identifies strategic objectives and priority areas to reduce disaster risks in the next 10 years.

In conclusion, we would like to emphasize the fact that humanitarian crises must be tackled with common actions and joint resolve. Existing capacity gaps need to be filled by strengthening existing partnerships and increasing the involvement of the private sector.

Mr. Maurer (Switzerland) (*spoke in French*): We welcome the holding of this annual debate on the strengthening of the coordination of humanitarian assistance. We believe that a great deal has been done in this field in the past year, notably in emergency situations of unprecedented size and complexity. We would like to express our gratitude for the work done by humanitarian personnel on behalf of millions of people in distress throughout the world.

We would like also to thank Mr. Jan Egeland, Under-Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs, and his colleagues for the remarkable work undertaken and for his continued leadership in the humanitarian field.

Access to civilian populations and the security conditions in which humanitarian organizations operate remain largely unsatisfactory and very worrisome. It is clear that long-term efforts must be made to ensure strict compliance with international humanitarian law by all the actors involved. We believe also that a determined and long-term commitment by the international community is necessary with respect to international policy in areas such as security, sustainable development and human rights.

We are encouraged by the provisions on these two fundamental issues contained in the final outcome document of the High-level Meeting held in mid-September, and we urge that they be implemented in a concerted and determined manner by all Member States.

Proposals regarding the adjustment of international humanitarian aid capacities are currently under discussion. Such proposals are welcome, and we

support the objectives specified. However, it is important that those objectives fully take into account the diversity of the humanitarian system, the specific roles and mandates of International Movement of the Red Cross and Red Crescent institutions, and the role played by non-governmental organizations and by local and national actors. Given that emergency situations take a variety of forms, we believe that such an adjustment process should, above all, enhance and strengthen the collective response of all actors involved, taking account of their comparative advantages, their mandates and their particular skills.

With respect to the reform of the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF), Switzerland has announced its intention to make available to CERF, at the appropriate time, the sum of 5 million Swiss francs. However, we believe that there is a need for more detailed discussions with all stakeholders so as to clarify its parametres of action and its specific working procedures, in particular its internal and external accountability mechanisms.

The cluster approach also deserves to be tested on the ground and the lessons learned in the implementation phase — such as those drawn from the current response to the earthquake that hit South Asia on 8 October — should be rapidly incorporated in order to optimize the international response system. We encourage the organizations and countries concerned not to overlook the central role that local and national capacities can play in the context of humanitarian response.

Moreover, while we support the humanitarian coordinator system and an improved definition of that function within the United Nations country team, we wish also to stress the need to maintain the independence of humanitarian action in the framework of integrated United Nations missions. In our view, it would be useful also to further clarify the relationship between United Nations and non-United Nations members of the Inter-Agency Standing Committee at the strategic and operational levels as well as on the ground with regard to the establishment of accountability mechanisms.

Finally, we would like to stress the importance that Switzerland attaches to the preservation of a system of humanitarian assistance that is based on, and implemented according to, the principles of impartiality, neutrality and independence and whose purpose is to save lives and preserve human dignity in all circumstances.

Mr. Laurin (Canada) (*spoke in French*): This year, natural disasters of unprecedented scale and ongoing conflicts have forced millions of people to seek humanitarian assistance. The Indian Ocean tsunami, the food crisis in the Sahel, the earthquake in South Asia and protracted conflicts such as those in the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Darfur region of the Sudan are just a few of the crises that have stretched humanitarian response capacities to their limits. These crises have also highlighted the undeniable need to prioritize disaster management and mitigation.

Reinforcing the coordination of humanitarian assistance within the United Nations has long been a Canadian foreign policy priority. We therefore welcome the efforts made over the past year to strengthen the international humanitarian system, with a particular focus on ensuring more a predictable, timely and effective United Nations response.

The humanitarian response review is an important undertaking that has spotlighted issues requiring immediate solutions. It has made a number of useful recommendations that require action on our part. We look to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) to provide us with an integrated humanitarian reform action plan outlining how OCHA, along with the Inter-Agency Standing Committee, will implement those recommendations as well as those contained in the Secretary-General's report.

We congratulate the Emergency Relief Coordinator and the Inter-Agency Standing Committee on their efforts to advance the cluster approach. Canada enthusiastically welcomes any proposal aimed at improving existing structures by making them more predictable and more accountable. We look forward to a more thorough dialogue with Member States on its operational and budgetary implications. The current situation in South Asia provides an opportunity to see how well this new approach will work.

(*spoke in English*):

Canada strongly supports the Secretary-General's proposal to expand the Central Emergency Revolving Fund (CERF) and appreciates the efforts made by OCHA to incorporate Member States' views in the

report. We view the expanded CERF as one important tool to achieve more timely and equitable humanitarian funding, an issue at the heart of good humanitarian donorship.

We intend to make a significant contribution to the Fund in 2006. We are prepared to make multi-year commitments to the CERF if we are satisfied with its operations in the first year and if we see continued improvements in the Consolidated Appeal Process and the needs assessments which underpin them.

The CERF can only be as effective as the analysis that guides its allocations. In order to allocate funds to where the needs are greatest, we have to agree on what those needs are and how best to address them. There have been efforts to strengthen humanitarian needs assessments over the past few years, for example through the Standardized Monitoring and Assessment of Relief and Transition (SMART) initiative. Canada believes we must refocus our energy on this issue to ensure that scarce humanitarian resources are indeed being allocated where needs are greatest.

There must also be a renewed commitment to strengthen the Consolidated Appeal Process, which remains the most important tool for ensuring strategic, coordinated and effective humanitarian response. There have been significant improvements to the Process over the past several years, yet quality remains inconsistent. Neither of these two issues — CERF or the Consolidated Appeal Process — was explicitly addressed in the Humanitarian Response Review, although addressing them is critical to ensuring more effective humanitarian action.

Finally, let me underscore the importance of strengthening the role and capacities of humanitarian and resident coordinators. This was highlighted in the Humanitarian Response Review, which made specific recommendations for follow-up. Over the next year, we would like to see clear progress in the selection and training of Humanitarian and Resident Coordinators.

The Consolidated Appeal Process, the CERF and the clusters are all tools that should enhance the humanitarian response of the United Nations. Above all, these tools and the other components must form a cohesive whole that is more effective than the sum of its parts. We believe that ongoing commitment from all Member States — be they new or traditional donors — remains essential.

It is important to stress that all of these improvements will be of little consequence to affected populations if we do not put the protection of civilians at the heart of the international agenda. There are still too many flagrant violations of international humanitarian law, and impunity continues to be present in several conflicts. In too many conflicts civilians continue to pay the price, as do humanitarian workers. Rampant sexual and gender-based violence remain a reality in a number of contexts. Consequently, while the fifth anniversary of Security Council resolution 1296 (2000) is coming to a close, the protection of civilians remains a source of serious concern for Canada, which will continue to maintain its commitment in this area.

Let me conclude by reiterating Canada's commitment to continue working with the Emergency Relief Coordinator and Member States in strengthening the humanitarian system. Let us make a collective commitment to ensure that all our efforts lead to real change in the lives of people affected by crisis everywhere.

The meeting rose at 1.15 p.m.